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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 005547

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY ZOELLICK'S JULY 13 MEETING WITH
EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ABOUL GHEIT

Classified by Charge Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

1. (U) June 13, 2005; 3:45 p.m.; Cairo, Egypt.

2. (U) Participants:

U.S.

The Deputy Secretary
Charge Michael Corbin
NEA PDAS Elizabeth Cheney
Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli
D Executive Assistant Ross Wilson
Embassy notetaker

Egypt

Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit
Chief of Staff Sameh Shukry
Ambassador Shaida Farag, American Affairs
Walid Abdel Nasser, Deputy Head of Mission, Washington D.C.
Mohammed Abulkheir, Minister's Cabinet (American Affairs)
Ali Erfan, Minister's Cabinet (Peace Process)
Alaa al-Hadidi, Minister's Cabinet (Arab Affairs)
Hisham Afifi, Minister's Cabinet (Sudan)
Ahmed Ezzat, Minister's Cabinet (Press)

Summary

3. (C) The Deputy Secretary discussed Sudan, Iraq, the fragile state of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, and Egypt's Foreign Military Funding (FMF) with Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit on July 13, 2005. On Sudan, the parties confirmed the need to continue USG-GOE cooperation, maintain frequent high level contacts with GOS officials, ensure that external influences in Sudan (e.g. Eritrea) remain constructive, and maintain pressure for accountability on Darfur through the International Criminal Court. On Iraq, the Deputy Secretary urged the GOE to remain engaged despite the recent murder of Ambassador Sherif and noted that Iraqi PM Jafari sought an invitation to Egypt. Aboul Gheit made it clear that there would need to be a calming period between Egypt and Iraq and stressed his displeasure over Iraqi accusations that Sherif was interacting with insurgents. Aboul Gheit was concerned over statements by Prime Minister Sharon following the July 12 suicide bombing in Netanya. He predicted, however, that Abu Mazen would do whatever possible to avoid spilling Palestinian blood. Aboul Gheit made a plea that Secretary Rice and NEA Assistant Secretary Welch do more to ward off efforts in Congress to reduce Egypt's FMF. Zoellick reassured Aboul Gheit of the Department's support, but stressed the important role Egypt's progress on reform could play in improving Egypt's image in Congress. End summary.

Sudan

4. (C) The Deputy Secretary praised the GOE's efforts to promote peace in Sudan, citing its work with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the dispatch of peacekeepers, and humanitarian assistance to Darfur. He also highlighted the potential for greater USG-GOE cooperation in the coming months.

5. (C) Aboul Gheit appreciated the Deputy Secretary's observation about the need for more positive press on Egypt's work in Sudan, and asked him to help improve Egypt's image in the U.S. Agreeing that the current peace is fragile, Aboul Gheit said that USG-GOE cooperation on Sudan will need to continue for years, not months. He also said that Egypt wants to do more in Sudan, but the African Union is an obstacle. Aboul Gheit elaborated on his personal outreach, stating that he had told Osman El-Merghani, whose party was considering whether to join the government or work as an opposition party, that a decision to participate would reduce the likelihood that the GOS will be subject to the fragmentation of the past 40 years. Aboul Gheit said that he was concerned about the release of Turabi pursuant to the end of martial law, describing Turabi as dangerous and cunning.

16. (C) Achieving success in Sudan, according to Aboul Gheit, will depend on three factors. He noted first the need for high level visits by both Egyptian and U.S. officials. We must keep Sudan "leashed" to us, Aboul Gheit said, and commended the Deputy Secretary for visiting Sudan three times in the past several months. Second, outside influences must be neutral. For example, Aboul Gheit observed, Eritrea has not been helpful. Aboul Gheit said he and Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS) Director General Soliman have been pressuring Eritrea to be more cooperative and, in exchange, offered to help Eritrea resolve its dispute with Ethiopia. Aboul Gheit urged the U.S. to apply similar pressure -- to "check Eritrea" -- by whatever means. The Deputy Secretary reported that the U.S. Ambassador to Eritrea recently pressed President Isais to be constructive regarding the Beja, and that the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa will visit Eritrea in a few weeks carrying the same message.

17. (C) The final critical element in the Sudan equation, Aboul Gheit said, is preventing the emergence of any tension that may derail the process. Referring to the possibility that work by the International Criminal Court (ICC) could eventually lead to the prosecution of GOS officials, Aboul Gheit urged the ICC to maintain pressure in a way that does not corner the GOS, thereby pressuring it to abandon its commitment. The Deputy Secretary noted the need for the ICC not to interfere in the Sudanese peace process.

Iraq

18. (C) The Deputy Secretary expressed sympathy on behalf of the USG and Secretary Rice over the murder of Ambassador Ihab Sherif. He shared his impression that Iraqi Prime Minister Ja'fari is acutely aware of the delicate state of Iraq's relationship with Egypt. Ja'fari would, the Deputy Secretary noted, welcome an invitation to visit Egypt. Given President Mubarak's experience, the Deputy Secretary observed, he would be a good counselor to the new Iraqi leader. The Deputy Secretary also shared his impression that Iraq's Sunnis

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appear to be moving in the right direction and that Ja'fari is sensitive to the Sunni dynamic. He encouraged the GOE to maintain ties with Iraq, whether through military training or humanitarian outreach, at a pace comfortable for Egypt.

19. (C) There must be a calming period between Egypt and Iraq, Aboul Gheit responded, explaining the decision to withdraw a large number of people from the Egyptian mission in Baghdad. Aboul Gheit characterized as "not helpful" Iraq's effort to deflect responsibility for Sherif's killing and its accusations that Sherif had contact with insurgents. If Iraq could not bring itself to apologize for Sherif's death, it should have remained silent, Aboul Gheit said, particularly because there was no evidence whatsoever that Sherif, who had only been in country for 31 days, had any contact with insurgents. Moreover, Aboul Gheit remarked, if such contacts did exist between GOE officials and Iraqis, it would not have been at the initiative of a diplomat like Sherif. Should the new Iraqi ambassador to Egypt ask to come tomorrow, Aboul Gheit said, the GOE would ask for a delay.

Peace Process

110. (C) Aboul Gheit characterized the Palestinian situation as "a mess," referring to Sharon's reported pledge to retake Tulkarm and destroy the Islamic Jihad. "He will fail," Aboul Gheit proclaimed, "as he has failed for 35 years." While he said he is publicly calling for restraint on both sides, Aboul Gheit warned that circumstances may force him to put public pressure on Israel.

111. (C) Regarding Abu Mazen's ability to build security, Aboul Gheit expressed guarded confidence that with time, support, encouragement, and understanding from moderate Israelis, Abu Mazen will be o.k. The situation Abu Mazen inherited is admittedly difficult, Aboul Gheit sympathized, listing corruption, a shattered Fatah, and a broken Palestinian Authority as among the challenges. But, Aboul Gheit predicted, Abu Mazen will continue to honor the sacred Palestinian oath not to spill Palestinian blood, although, at a certain point, he will need to act like Ben Gurion and be willing to jail or even hang people to ensure the sacrifices made over decades are not lost. Aboul Gheit warned that there is widespread skepticism among Arabs that a Gaza first, Gaza last mentality prevails. In spite of the challenges he faces, Abu Mazen will not, Aboul Gheit declared, allow a civil war among his people.

Foreign Military Funding

112. (C) Expressing his annoyance and concern over efforts to reduce Egypt's Foreign Military Funding (FMF) by Representatives Lantos and Hyde, Aboul Gheit asked that Secretary Rice and NEA Assistant Secretary Welch be seen to

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engage the House and Senate to defend Egypt's interests. He raised concern over reports that the U.S. Department of Defense is not "doing its part" to defend Egypt vigorously.

113. (C) The Deputy Secretary defended efforts by the Department and DOD to reach out to Congress, citing a letter to the Appropriations Committee and efforts by Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense England. NEA PDAS Cheney observed that

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one way to defend against attempts to reduce FMF is by highlighting Egypt's progress on reform. When Aboul Gheit asked Cheney for her views on the state of reform, she said Egypt is heading in the right direction. The Deputy Secretary elaborated on the need to ensure that Egypt's

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progress on reform is well-publicized, noting that while political processes in the USG appear transparent, they are quite complex.

114. (U) This message was cleared by D.

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